AN OUTLINE OF THE PROPOSED

RESEARCH WORK

‘PLATONISM IN THE POETRY OF WORDSWORTH, SHELLEY AND KEATS: A REASSESSMENT’

SYNOPSIS

Submitted to

Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded.

FOR

THE REGISTRATION FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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(2016-17)

‘PLATONISM IN THE POETRY OF WORDSWORTH, SHELLEY AND KEATS: A REASSESSMENT’

Abstract

Plato was one of the greatest philosophers of beauty and the most unmatched ethical idealist, but he is known as the prime and unabashed enemy of poetry in both the history of ideas and aesthetics. It is one of the greatest ironies regarding Plato. After Plato, poetry is perpetually being defended against him and the other poetry haters. Sidney has aptly coined the term ‘misomousoi’ to denote poetry- haters. Plato drew a perfect line between pseudo-poetry and poetry proper. He was mainly concerned with the didactic side of art and literature. He believed that poetry should sub serve individuals and social morality. Plato was not against all types of poetry. He was against the abuse of poetry. In the ideal *Republic*, he welcomed those poets who composed hymns to gods and panegyrics of famous men. Despite Plato’s hatred for poets as misleading imitators of worldly illusions, Platonic ideas have repeatedly been adopted in western Literature. He exerted both positive and negative influence upon the advocates and the antagonists of poetry and art in the succeeding ages. The puritans never failed to employ his weapons to combat the insidious influence of poetry, while its defenders like Sidney, William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge, P. B. Shelley and John Keats, invoked his theory of inspiration to uphold the dignity of art and literature. The influence of Plato’s ideas and philosophy is seen on the poems of William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and John Keats.

Romantic poetry is characterized by Hellenic spirit. William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and Especially John Keats adhered Greek literature, mythology, culture and art. I intend to study Greek influence, particularly an influence of Plato, Greek philosopher, on the poetry of William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and John Keats. John Keats dealt with Greek gods and goddesses, mythology art and architecture in his poetry. Shelley spent a considerable time in the study of Plato’s philosophy. He was deeply influenced and motivated by Plato.

Significance of the Study

Plato has been misunderstood from the ages as an enemy of poetry, but he has been followed by many authors and poets. In reality, he was not against poetry and poets; he was against the abuse of poetry. Plato and Platonic philosophy must be

understood in relation with Romantic poetry. Plato as a philosopher is very vast to study and his views and philosophy have been followed by many thinkers and authors. His philosophy and thoughts are visible in Romantic poetry. While studying the Poetry of William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and John Keats, I observed close resemblance in thoughts of these poets and Platonic ideals. I felt that no one has made attempts in this regard to bring out the resemblances between thoughts of these poets and Platonic ideals in order to make the study of Romantic poetry comprehensive and substantial.

My basic objective as a literary scholar to choose this topic 'Platonism in the Poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats: a Reassessment' is to find out interrelation between Plato's ideas and the thoughts that are expressed in the poetry of Romantic Poets. My research on Plato and his influence on the poetry of Romantic poets will be beneficial to the students of English literature to analyze the poems of William Wordsworth, P.B. Shelley and John Keats from the point of view of Platonic philosophy. As a student of English Literature, it is necessary to analyze and appreciate poetry from all sides. The appreciation of poetry is comparatively difficult one. Much research has been done on Plato in Humanities as well as in Social Sciences. Different Scholars have tried to interpret Platonic Philosophy from different angles, but I personally and honestly feel that one aspect of Romantic Poetry from the point of view of Platonic Philosophy should be explored and brought in to light.

Review of Literature

'Platonism' is a term that refers to the doctrines of Greek philosopher Plato. Especially, it refers to idealist belief that, the perceptible world is an illusionary shadow of some higher realms of transcendental ideas or forms. Despite Plato's hostility to poets as misleading imitators of worldly illusions, Platonic ideals have repeatedly been adopted in western literature.

During the Romantic Revival there was marked revival of interest in the concept of platonic love and great interest in Platonism in general. P. B. Shelley, John Keats and William Wordsworth especially were strongly influenced by it. Platonism is particularly noticeable in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*. Plato's conception of love coloured Shelley's view of love. Atkin says, "He is, in the truest sense, a light bringer, ever guiding men's steps to the spiritual side of art".

In the Renaissance Age, Plato's view of physical beauty as an outward sign of spiritual perfection is prevalent in love poetry, while in the Age of Romanticism his idealist philosophy was absorbed by poets like P. B. Shelley and John Keats. Plato conceived of supreme power i.e. divine power, which moves through all the objects of Nature and human life. Shelley's religious ideas were more in conformity with the Greeks rather than with the Christians. Like Plato, he conceived of a supreme power, which is at once immanent and transcendent, which moves through all the objects of nature and human life.

Plato conceived of supreme power i.e. divine power, which moves through all the objects of Nature and human life. Wordsworth incorporated this Platonic view in his famous poem *Tintern Abbey*. He, like Plato, believes that there is a supreme power which governs and controls all objects and all activities that take place in the universe.

"I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with joy;
Of elevated thought, a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused;
Whose dwelling is the light of setting Sun;
And the round ocean, and the living air
And the blue sky and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit that impels;
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley believed in Pantheism i.e. the belief in supreme power that permeates through all the objects of Nature, be they are animate or inanimate. This Spirit, according to Plato, is the governing spirit of the Universe. Like Plato, Shelley believed that the one spirit moves through the universe, giving them form and shape according to its power. In *Adonais*, Shelley represents this power:

"The one remains many change and pass
Heaven's light forever shines, earth's shadow fly
Life like a dome of many coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of eternity
Until death tramples it to fragments".

In the above lines, Shelley conceives of a divine spirit, which is external and endless, gives shape and form to life. Shelley celebrates this spirit in many different ways. Sometimes this spirit takes the form of love and sometimes that of supreme beauty. In some poems that spirit assumes the form of supreme wisdom and supreme liberty on the whole, like Plato; Shelley describes it as the informing and formative spirit which completes matter to its will. All objects in this world are forced by this shaping spirit to develop to perfection. Shelley takes this spirit as the spirit of love. In the poem *Adonais,* Shelley considers it as the spirit of love, which moves through all the objects of Nature.

"------- That sustaining love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or deem, as each are mirrors
of the fire for which all thirst".

The Romantic poets believed that the artist was a supremely individual creator, whose creative spirit is more important than strict adherence to rules and regulations. They revolted against the classical movement. Motivated by Plato, both Shelley and Keats were and ardent lovers of the Greeks. Shelley dealt with several platonic ideas in his poetry. Shelley is platonic in his conception of beauty. There are strains of platonic philosophy in the poems like *Hellas, Sensitive Plant Adonais* and *Epipsychidion*. In the *Sensitive plant* the poet remarks wisely like a philosopher and believe in the eternity of love, beauty and delight as exhibited in the following lines.

"For love and beauty and delight,
there is no death nor change".

John Keats followed Shelley as well as Plato and put forward the same conception in his famous poem *Endymion*.

"A thing of beauty is a joy for every,
Its loveliness increases, it will never,
Pass into nothingness".

Both the poets John Keats and P.B. Shelley stand together in their generation as the two prophets of beauty. They believed in the eternity of beauty.

The central fact of Keats life was the existence of the spiritual essence called beauty. Shelley was philosophic in his conception of beauty whereas Keats interested himself in revealing this beauty to human senses and proclaiming its universal

importance. Beauty was more an inspiration and enthusiasm to Keats than to Shelley. The distinction between these two poets as lovers of beauty is significant and vital. Keats traveled from earth to Heaven, whereas Shelley from Heaven to earth.

Plato mostly railed upon the 'Inspiration'. Keats got inspiration from the principal of beauty. Keats remained throughout his life a great admirer and the adorer of beauty. Middleton Murry says "Beauty in all things this was Keats' great poetic intuition, and revelation of this beauty, the great human purpose to which he dedicated himself and for which he was prepared to die".

It becomes clear that William Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats treated poets and poetry in a similar vein to some extent. They believed that poets are visionary, different from ordinary mortals. Like Plato, they believed that poetry might serve community by helping to educate it. Shelley employed poetry for effecting reforms in the society. For Keats poetry was a vision of delight and an expression of the poet's soul in a state of animation.

The Romantic poets, William Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, made a significant contribution to the poetry during Romantic Revival. The essence of Shelley's work is his prophecy of a new-born age. He wrote *Hellas,* the drama, in the honour of Greece. Shelley was inspired by love; a love not limited to mankind, but extended to every living creature, to animals and flowers, to the element, to the whole of Nature. Shelley's another poem in Greek vain is *Alastor* (1816), in which he recounts his pursuit of an unattainable ideal of beauty. The *Cenci* is in a dramatic form, which deals with a terrible story of Beatrice, who, the victim of father's lust, takes his life in revenge. In *Epipsychidion* he sings of his love for a beautiful young Italian girl. *Adonais* is an elegy dedicated to John Keats. In all English poetry there is no utterance as spontaneous as Shelley's. In Shelley's poetry we find a beautiful blending of pantheistic philosophy with scientific outlook. Wordsworth and Shelley cared for Nature more than other Romantic poets. Compto Rickett remarks, "Wordsworth found brooding and tranquilizing thought at the heart of nature; Shelley an ardent and persuasive love". Shelley finds in Nature the true manifestation of his own nature and derives from nature what may be called his philosophy of life.

John Keats, the Adonais' of Shelley's song, whose life was yet briefer than Shelley's, was unique both as Romantic poet and as a lover of Nature. His pole – star was beauty, in Nature, in mankind, in art. He seized upon beauty wherever it had been plentiful on earth, in Greek mythology, in medieval legend, in great poetry. After a

few Javenile verses, Keats published his poem *Endymion*, written in couplets. Some pages of it are admirable. The growth of his powers was so rapid that by 1820 he had published a volume which included such masterpieces as *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes* and a fragment of *Hyperion,* in which he designed to tell the downfall of the primitive gods of Greece before the advent of younger gods endowed with supreme beauty. Besides these, he had written odes *(Ode to Nightingale, Ode on a Gracian Urn, To Autumn, and Ode to Psyche,)* which are the most exquisite expression of his genius. He was more influenced by Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare and less by Plato. Keats cultivated the wealth of detail which loads every word and every note of his poetry. No other English poet brings together so many riches in a single line or a single stanza.

Both the poets, Shelley and Keats lived a short life but left an immense contribution in the field of poetry. The poets P.B. Shelley and John Keats absorbed Plato's idealist Philosophy in a less or more degree in their poetry. Plato's mysticism, his theory of inspiration, his concept of love, an idea of philosophic and aesthetic trinity, his theory of ideas and his pantheism find noticeable expression in the poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats.

P. B. Shelley and John Keats were the great adorers of beauty. They stood together as the two prophets of beauty in the early nineteenth century poetry. They followed Plato in the adoration of beauty, truth and the good. Plato, in his *Symposium* argued that the good, truth and the beauty were one, a form of aesthetic and philosophic trinity. Both the poets, John Keats and P.B. Shelley followed Plato in his conception of beauty. But the distinction between these two poets as lovers of beauty was vital and significant. Whereas Shelley was interested in the philosophical and intellectual aspect of beauty, Keats was delighted, in the early phase of his literary career, in the representation of beauty in its sensuous and physical aspects. Beauty for Shelley was metaphysical. It was an intellectual idea, a spirit working through the universe and ultimately indistinguishable from love, which he believed to sustain the universe. Keats formulated his philosophy of beauty in the concluding lines of the *Ode to a Gracian Urn.*

Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all;

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Keats thought that beauty was eternal and indestructible. Beauty and truth were the highest characteristics of the transcendental being, whom we call God. They

were very much akin to each other, as Plato viewed truth, beauty and the good as philosophic and aesthetic trinity.

Romantic poetry is characterized by Hellenic spirit. William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley and Especially John Keats adhered Greek literature, mythology, culture and art. I intend to study Greek influence on the poetry of William Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. Particularly an influence of Plato; Greek philosopher, on the poetry of William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and John Keats.

Objectives

Through the present research work an attempt will be made to enhance the knowledge. It will broaden the mind and sharpen the critical insight as far as the study of the poetry of the selected poets is concerned. The present research work undertakes the study of Platonism of P. B. Shelley and John Keats in order to achieve following objectives.

1) To study Plato's ideas and philosophy.
2) To throw light on Greek Mythology and legends and its impact on the poetry of William Wordsworth, P.B. Shelley and John Keats.
3) To study the influence of Plato's ideas on the poetry of William Wordsworth, P.B. Shelley and John Keats.
4) Plato's ideas and thoughts are immortal. He is alive in the form of his work. One of the important objectives of the research is to make the study of Plato's ideas and its influence on the Poetry of William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and John Keats easy and comprehensive to the students of English literature.
5) To interpret the work of William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and John Keats from the point of view of Platonic philosophy.

Data Collection

The data required for the present research work will be collected from the following sources:

1) Primary Data

Primary data will be collected from the poetry written by William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and John Keats and the original works written by Plato.

2) Secondary Data:

The required data will also be collected from the secondary sources such as the reference books, critical books, journals, magazines, newspapers and web material will be referred for the same.

Hypothesis

The present study has something concrete that will definitely contribute to appreciate Romantic poetry from platonic philosophy so that it will enhance the appreciation and enjoyment of the Romantic Poetry and similarly it will make conversational transaction more effective.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

The present study is limited to the phenomenon of Plato's influence on the Poetry of William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and John Keats. The study will be concentrated over the incorporation Plato's thoughts in the poetry of selected Poets. Plato, who is by mistake considered as an enemy of poetry, will be studied as a beloved of Romantic Poets.

Methodology

The present research work does not call for any field work and hence M. L. A. method of research would be followed. The research will be based on the comparative and critical analysis of the poetry of selected poets in the light of Plato's ideas. The research methodology for the research will be analytical and exploratory based on primary and secondary sources. The research aims at exploring Plato's influence on the Poetry of William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley and John Keats. Plato is studied in almost all branches of knowledge. He must have been read by Shelley and Keats as a result they have incorporated Plato's ideals in their poetry. On the one hand, Plato is considered as an enemy of poetry and on the other hand his thoughts have been incorporated in poetry. It is interesting to study. As the research work does not need field work, the texts of selected poets, the reference books, critical books, journals, magazines, newspapers and web material will be referred for the same.

Chapter Scheme

The thesis will be divided into five chapters

1. Introduction

The Chapter First will deal with defining Platonism and also will include Plato's philosophy and ideas. Plato's views on art and literature are scattered all over

his works in the form of stray references. In his *Ion* and *The Republic* (more especially book X), he has expressed his views on poetry and its nature and function. His views on poetic inspiration, imitation, and his condemnation of poetry are not only interesting in themselves but also of a great historical significance. Plato gave genuine philosophical formulation to aesthetic and critical problems. During the course of philosophical discussions in several of his Dialogues, especially, *Ion, Symposium, Republic* and *Laws* his utterances on literature occur. If the history of European thought is essentially a series of footnotes to Plato's philosophy, the history of criticism may also be likewise considered a series of footnotes to Plato's observation on beauty, art and poetry.

2. Platonic ideas in the poetry of William Wordsworth

The Second Chapter will be the detailed study of Wordsworth's work in the light of Platonism. Plato approved one kind of poetry, which he defines as "hymns to the gods and praises of famous men." However, he does not dwell further on the subject nor does he say what he meant by that. As stated earlier, Romanticism shows a notable inclination toward a certain kind of spirituality. Wordsworth's poetry does offer many illustrations of this religious current. Therefore, one can certainly wonder whether his poetry could be admissible in Plato's ideal state.

3. Platonic view of P. B. Shelley

The Third chapter will focus on the works of P. B. Shelley for this research work in detail. The essence of Shelley's work is his prophecy of a new-born age. He wrote *Hellas*, the drama, in the honour of Greece. Shelley was inspired by love; a love not limited to mankind, but extended to every living creature, to animals and flowers, to the element, to the whole of Nature. Shelley's another poem in Greek vain is *Alastor* (1816), in which he recounts his pursuit of an unattainable ideal of beauty. The *Cenci* is in a dramatic form, which deals with a terrible story of Beatrice, who, the victim of father's lust, takes his life in revenge. In *Epipsychidion* he sings of his love for a beautiful young Italian girl. *Adonais* is an elegy dedicated to John Keats. In all English poetry there is no utterance as spontaneous as Shelley's. Shelley finds in Nature the true manifestation of his own nature and derives from nature what may be called his philosophy of life which resembles Plato.

4. The Study of Plato's influence on the poetry of John Keats

The Fourth chapter will attempt to study analytically the works of John Keats in the light of Platonic philosophy. John Keats, the Adonais' of Shelley's song, whose life was yet briefer than Shelley's, was unique both as Romantic poet and as a lover of Nature. His pole – star was beauty, in Nature, in mankind, in art. He seized upon beauty wherever it had been plentiful on earth, in Greek mythology, in medieval legend, in great poetry. After a few Javenile verses, Keats published his poem *Endymion*, written in couplets. Some pages of it are admirable. The growth of his powers was so rapid that by 1820 he had published a volume which included such masterpieces as *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes* and a fragment of *Hyperion,* in which he designed to tell the downfall of the primitive gods of Greece before the advent of younger gods endowed with supreme beauty. Besides these, he had written odes *(Ode to Nightingale, Ode on a Gracian Urn, To Autumn, and Ode to Psyche,)* which are the most exquisite expression of his genius. He was more influenced by Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare and less by Plato. Keats cultivated the wealth of detail which loads every word and every note of his poetry. No other English poet brings together so many riches in a single line or a single stanza.

5. Conclusion

Chapter Five will be of conclusion that will reassess the entire study and analyze the outcome of this entire research wok. The poets William Wordsworth, P.B. Shelley and John Keats absorbed Plato's idealist Philosophy in a less or more degree in their poetry. The Chapter will include analytical and comparative study of the philosophy of the selected poets in the light Platonism. Dealing with this, the chapter will again study in depth Keats' and Shelley's vision behind writing and it will make an attempt to enlighten the world with inert philosophies.

The present Synopsis is mere an outline of research work. The changes may be inevitable in the chapter scheme or concerned study during the research work.

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